

# **“Town of Mussels”**

## **A Danish case study on place branding, food festivals and community identity**



Bodil Stilling Blichfeldt

Danish Centre for Rural Research (CLF)  
University of Southern Denmark  
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Bodil Stilling Blichfeldt  
Danish Centre for Rural Research (CLF)  
University of Southern Denmark  
Niels Bohrs Vej 9-10  
DK-6700 Esbjerg  
Tel.: +45 6550 4221  
Fax: +45 6550 1091  
E-mail: [clf@sam.sdu.dk](mailto:clf@sam.sdu.dk)







## **Abstract**

Especially in rural areas, there is an increase in specialised food festivals. Such festivals may serve a variety of purpose, including boosting of tourism, enhancement of place image, and celebration of group and place identity. Drawing on a single case study of mussel festivals in a rural area, that needs to be innovative in order to attract new residents, business and tourists, the paper discusses how and why a niche food festival may contribute to fulfilment of the area's needs. The paper addresses the issues of (i) the food festival as a means to differentiate the area from other rural areas (i.e. the quest for a unique event) and (ii) how the multiplicity of actors and objectives intertwine. The paper furthermore identifies a series of issues that transcend the case in question and thus, offers a series of managerial implications for food festivals in rural areas.



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## Introduction

Although food festivals may be characterized as niche events, these events are increasing in numbers (Einarsen & Mykletun, 2009; Griffin & Frongillo, 2003). Moreover, there seems to be a tendency for these festivals to become increasingly specialized. For example, Spring Valley, Ohio hosts an annual potato festival; Piemonte, Italy and Mundaring, Australia truffle festivals; Norway, lobster festival; Galway, Ireland (amongst others), oyster festival; a number of cities, shrimp festivals; Pennsylvania (amongst others), annual apple harvest festivals; California, Ohio and New Hampshire, pumpkin festivals; and a number of American areas have mussel festivals. Albeit highly specialized, many of these festivals attract quite a number of visitors and although they may not qualify as large events *per se*, compared to the size of the communities hosting them they are *relatively* large. To exemplify the nature of these festivals, the following is an extract from a word-of-keyboard review of the Maine Lobster festival:

*6 of us headed up to Maine from Boston for the weekend to enjoy Lobsterfest and do some camping while we're out there. We were stoked to see what this is all about...a 60 year tradition in Maine. We got to the main event Saturday right before noon after walking about 20 minutes from our parking spot (at Hanaford's because they blocked off all streets leading to Lobsterfest because of the parade). The parade preceding the fest seemed to be pretty lively and the town looked cute with a bunch of different shops. There were a lot of old people there. Like Moses leading his people through the desert, we finally reached our promised land. Paid \$8 each to get in. There's definitely a carnival atmosphere with the tents and stands offering a variety of goods [...] We walked towards the main tent where they serve the lobster dinner...*

*<http://www.yelp.com/biz/maine-lobster-festival-rockland>,  
accessed June 2010*

As another example, one of the reviews of Gettysburg Apple Harvest Festival that is posted on TripAdvisor reads as follows:

*My husband and I have decided to make our trip to Gettysburg an "annual thing". And every year we go to the apple festival. We leave our hotel early and drive to one of the designated parking areas and ride on the school bus into the festival. We always have such a great time! There are countless numbers of stands and not to mention, wonderful food of all kinds! But the cider is the best! This year we are bringing our 8 month old son with us for the first time and we are looking forward to sharing the history of Gettysburg and the "sweetness" of our favorite festival!*

<http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g60798-d627952-r44556153.html>,  
accessed June 2010

And a final example, which is one of 63 reviews of the San Francisco Oyster and Beer Festival that are available on the yelp website (reviewers rate the festival from 1 to 4 on a 5 point scale):

*I LOVE indulging in raw oysters and beer! Heck, growing up my mommy told me I'd be smarter if I ate em...hmm...something tells me mom was making that up. So being a newbie to the festival I was excited to experience an orgasmic oyster eating fest. First off, parking is a terrible nightmare when thousand attend the area, so be aware. \$25 for admission...yikes, this better be worth it.... \$22 for a dozen oysters on the half shell. Only one kind, only one EXPENSIVE price! Despite the lack of variation, which I expected at an oyster festival, they were huge, fresh, and delicious. As for the beer - 3 choices (wow more choices than oysters?!); light, medium, or dark. [...] Loud live music was okay, plenty of people hanging out kicking dirt while eating not only oysters, but the usual greasy festival food: garlic fries, calamari, hot dogs, etc. Added, of course was long lines to the port a*



*potty. I wish they had a bigger variation of oysters, but I still enjoyed hanging out with friends.*

*<http://www.yelp.com/biz/san-francisco-oyster-and-beer-festival-san-francisco>,  
accessed June 2010*

Although the three examples above emphasize the *touristic* experience of specialized food festivals, such festivals may serve a multitude of purposes; i.e. to attract tourists; to enhance place images in the eyes of potential settlers and/or business; and to celebrate group and place identity (De Brees and Davis, 2001). Furthermore, research devoted to the study of food festivals (e.g. Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000; Hall & Mitchell, 2008; Hall & Sharples, 2008) suggests that food festivals may be particularly intertwined with senses of place and pride due to their grounding in local produce and local culinary traditions. As suggested by previous studies (e.g. Einarsen & Mykletun, 2009), success of such festivals depends on embeddedness in strong networks; entrepreneurship; and organizational structures. Furthermore, as many food festivals (and particularly the one discussed in this paper) depend heavily on voluntary work, community commitment may also be critical to success.

It seems problematic to look at food festivals without also studying town, city or regional context due to the fact that events (and hence also food festivals) are one of the ways in which villages, towns and cities can brand themselves and henceforth, such events qualify as a way to compete with other cities for valuable resources (Florian, 2002). Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005:512) argue that “the city is simultaneously a place of residence and a place of work for the people that live in it, a destination for the people that visit it (or plan to do so), a place of opportunity for the people who invest in it”. The same could be said about food festivals, as these are simultaneously an opportunity for leisure entertainment for residents; a (to some extent voluntary based) place of work; a destination for (also one day) visitors; and a means to spur attention and hence-

forth possibly future investments and/or settlement. Accordingly, the boundaries between most festivals and cities are blurred to such an extent that it does not make much sense to only investigate one or the other. Thus, festivals are destination attractions as well as a part of the experience offered by the destination and the destination is ‘the’ place of the festival and accompanying hospitality (at least in cases such as the present, in which the festival is located in the town centre and not in an area that is abandoned for the remainder of the year, such as it is often the case with large music festivals)(Cooper et al, 2005).

In 2007, the first of a series of TV food programs hosted by Denmark’s probably best known chef (and one of the owners of one of the world’s finest restaurants; Noma) Claus Meyer was dedicated to ‘the town of mussels: Løgstør’. Apart from cooking, the program also featured storytelling about the place and the local food resources; particularly mussels and oysters. Furthermore, the chef proclaimed that the local shell fish are of particular quality due to the coldness of the water in the area. Between 10 and 15 percent of the Danish population saw that TV program (Christensen & Povlsen, 2008). Furthermore, since 2005 the ‘Mussel Harvesting Festival’ in April and the July ‘Mussel Festival’ have taken place each year. Both festivals include a variety of activities including art, music and gastronomy. Nonetheless, the primary event at both festivals is that mussels are served to all attendants – free of charge. Between 1500 and 2000 people usually attend this event.

***Figure 1. Some of the around 2000 people that line up for free of charge mussels***



It is difficult to determine whether a food festival is a success or not and thus, often success is simply assessed on the basis of visitor numbers (or, for example, by measuring the number of plates of free mussels that are served). Unfortunately, these are problematic measures as they only capture quantity of attendance; not quality (as it is captured by the three word-of-keyboard reviews above). Furthermore, it neither includes effects on equity of the place brand; nor the effects on community identity or pride. Nonetheless, on the basis of media coverage, visitor numbers and importance for the local community the mussel festivals in Løgstør seem successful, thus making it a case worthy of further study. Moreover, the Løgstør case is rather interesting as the mussel festivals are rather new (i.e. 6 years), thus enabling the researcher to unfold the history of

the festivals from start-up to the present state as annually re-occurring events. The purpose of this paper is hence to contribute with knowledge on niche food festivals in rural areas by means of investigation of one case (i.e. the mussel festivals hosted by the town of Løgstør). In the next two sections, the theoretical and methodological background of the study is presented. Thereafter, the findings pertaining to the mussels festivals as means to differentiation and as events during which a multiplicity of actors and objectives intertwine are presented.

## **Theoretical framework**

According to Janiske (1980:97) festivals are “formal periods or programs of pleasurable activities, entertainment, or events having a festive character and publicly celebrating some concept, happening or fact”. However, festivals – or at least specialised food festivals in rural areas – are usually also integral parts of place branding, local community initiatives and/or tourist attractions. In the following subsections, specialised food festivals are discussed within these different theoretical frameworks.

### ***Place branding***

The term ‘place branding’ refers to cities’, regions’, countries’ and/or destinations’ competition for tourists, visitors, investors, residents, resources etc. (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Place branding is often perceived as the application of marketing and branding techniques by those, who market a place (often a destination marketing organisation (DMO) or local government). As a result, place branding is often defined as DMO’s communication about the place in question to various target groups. However, as Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005:508) remind us “the boundaries of the brand construct are, on the one side the activities of the firm and on the other side the perceptions of the consumers. The brand becomes the interface between these two”. Concordantly,

place branding is not only about what ‘the firm’ (or DMO) does, but it also incorporates consumers’ (or local residents’, local business’, tourists’, potential residents’, investors’ etc.) perceptions of the place. Accordingly, a strong place brand is one that key target groups (however defined) are aware of *and* have strong, unique and favourable associations to. Furthermore, a unique feature that sets place branding aside from traditional branding is that although the notion ‘place branding’ is rather new (and not always used by those ‘doing’ place branding), place branding “is and has been, practiced consciously or unconsciously for as long as cities have competed with each other for trade, populations, wealth, prestige or power” (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005:510). Accordingly, the core ideas underlying place branding theory and practices are (a) that places compete with each other for a series of valuable resources and (b) the importance ascribed to place identity (even if this is no more than some sort of local (self)consciousness) and the use of this identity in order to attract valuable resources. One of the possible ‘uses of identity’ is events (e.g. a food festival). Furthermore, place brands address multiple groups of stakeholders (e.g. local residents and tourists), have high levels of complexity and intangibility and incorporate multiple identities (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Blichfeldt, 2005; Dematteis, 1994; Hankinson, 2004; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Focusing on the supply side, Allan (2007) argues that place branding draws upon a series of key stakeholders (i.e. tourism, private sector, people, government, culture & education, government and investment & immigration), who all need to (both collaboratively and individually) invest in and communicate what is happening in the place. One of the place branding initiatives that key stakeholders may invest in, and communicate about, is events (Ashworth & Voogd, 2005). Such initiatives may draw upon a wide range of stakeholders – especially if the event in question is closely related to the place’s core identity. Løgstør promotes itself as ‘the town of mussels: Løgstør’ and the mussel festivals thus seem to be extremely closely related to the core identity of Løgstør. Consequently, further investigation of these relations as well as of commitment across local stakeholders seems fruitful.

### *Changing and/or celebrating place identity*

According to De Brees and Davis (2001) challenging (or strengthening) perceptions of local identity is often the most important outcome of small festivals. Accordingly, small food festivals (such as the Mussel festivals in Løgstør) may especially relate to ‘internal place branding’; i.e. place branding initiatives the purpose of which is to lead to positive self-identification for the local community. Linkages between local identity and festivals have recently become a topic subject to research (e.g. Boyle, 1997; Davila, 1997; De Bres & Davis, 2001; Getz, 1997; Smith, 1993; Rotherham, 2008; Waterman, 1998). For example, Hill (1988) argues that festivals may serve to build ‘pride of place’, Hall (1992) argues that they may assist in development and/or maintenance of community identity and Getz (1997:7) claims that they may even qualify as “celebrations of the community itself”. Accordingly, festivals are not only seen as events targeting external audiences. Instead, these events may also give locals the opportunity to partake as both hosts and as guests (De Brees & Davis, 2001). Events may thus both generate income and provide recreational and leisure activities for locals (Long & Perdue, 1990). The effects of festivals may be particularly important in smaller places (such as Løgstør). For example, Aldskogius (1993) found that, in smaller places, a larger proportion of the community both produce and attend festivals. Unfortunately, events might celebrate some parts of the community, while neglecting, or even deliberately excluding, other parts of the community. Accordingly, further knowledge on events as celebrations of and/or means to change place identity is needed – and especially studies that include a variety of local stakeholders. Particularly, knowledge on the extent to which the mussel festivals are events targeting predominantly internal or external audiences may enhance our understanding of food festivals in rural areas at a more general level.

## ***Destination branding***

As mentioned above, the notion ‘destination branding’ is often used in order to emphasize that dimension of place branding, the aim of which is to target tourists. Accordingly, although festivals such as the Mussels festivals in Løgstør may particularly relate to development and/or enhancement of positive self-identification for the local community, such events may also be examples of tourism (De Bres & Davis, 2001). Yuan et al. (2005) argue that both festival motivation pull and push factors have been studied extensively. Furthermore, focusing on motivation of visitors to a wine and food festival, Park et al (2008) found that the factors taste; enjoyment; social status; change; meeting people; family; and meeting experts were decisive for the decision to attend this particular festival. Due to the fact that visitors are *always* (one of) the most critical stakeholder(s) in specialized food festivals, knowledge on both motivational factors and visitors’ actual experiences at the festival is needed. In particular, if events such as food festivals are integral parts of place branding it is crucial to gain knowledge on whether guests enact themselves as visitors at a food *festival* or as visitors at a specific *place* that hosts a food festival.

## **Methodology**

If we wish to uncover not only behavior, but also the lines of reasoning that guide behavior, we need to adopt a research strategy that enables us to produce rich and thick data on the topic at hand (in our case food festivals in rural areas). The research strategy that is probably best at generating rich and thick data is case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1981, 1984). Case study research focuses on how and why questions about a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context (Leonard-Barton, 1990). In the same vein, Yin (1984:23) defined case study research as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources



of evidence are used”. What is particularly important in Yin’s (1984) definition is that case studies are especially useful when the boundaries between the phenomenon (e.g. a specialized food festival) and the context (e.g. a town in a rural area) are not clearly evident. Furthermore, a key characteristic of the case study method is that the researcher should draw upon multiple sources of evidence (e.g. observations, qualitative interviews, questionnaires, and internal as well as external secondary data) in order to (i) triangulate sources of evidence and (ii) produce rich and thick data.

Single case studies are often criticized for generating large amounts of data that are context-bound to such an extent that they do not produce knowledge that transcends the case in question (Blichfeldt, 2009) and hence, they lack external validity as well as general interest. However, this problem may be minor insofar one studies the kind of cases that Teddlie and Yu (2007) categorize as typical cases. According to Seawright and Gerring (2008) a typical case is a case that is representative for the population of cases and thus, in our case a typical case would be one that represent all food festivals in rural areas. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to know at the time when one chooses which case to work with whether this case is, indeed, typical as one only knows enough about the case to determine this after case study research is conducted. However, Muslingebyen Løgstør was deemed a typical case on the basis of extensive reviews of the literature on food festivals and especially by applying the criterion that Patton (1990) labels theoretical sampling. Accordingly, the case is chosen because it is deemed ‘theoretically useful’ and is thus likely to refine, enrich and extend extant theory (Eisenhardt, 1989).

In accordance with Yin’s (1981) recommendations pertaining to case studies, the case study accounted for in this paper draws on a variety of sources of evidence. Firstly, the paper draws on interviews within the ‘inner circle’ of the festival organization. Secondly, official festival documents, media coverage of the festivals and the official website (and other marketing materials) of Muslinge-

byen Løgstør were analyzed. Thirdly, participant observations were conducted during the summer 2010 festival (unfortunately, for pragmatic reasons it was impossible for the researcher to participate in the 2010 harvest festival in April). Furthermore, during participation in the festival photography was used extensively and the hundreds of pictures were analyzed both by means of content analysis and used as supplements to interviews and participant observations.

***Figure 2. Examples of Pictures included in the Analysis***



Moreover, a series of interviews as well as more informal conversations with both hosts and guests were undertaken during the festival.

***Figure 3. The researcher talking with a local resident during the festival***



Illustration of the researcher's interactions with hosts and guests at the festival. Please notice the way, in which the local artists exhibit their work.

However, as mussel is a food product that many Danish people do not eat, 20 in-depth interviews with people that did not attend the festival were also conducted. These interviews relate to food culture in general, but they also incorporate specific questions pertaining to mussels. Furthermore, the researcher participated in a 'mussel cooking class' in order to gain knowledge on preparation and consumption of mussels – and especially on the issue of 'neophobic' (i.e. fear of novelty) food attitudes.

**Figure 4. Mussel cooking class**



The first picture shows the chef on his way to the cooking class, the second the ingredients lined up, and the third and fourth the participants produce – before and after the consumption act.

As for the interviews and conversations that were done at the festival, the goal was to obtain accounts of “how those being studied feel about and understand events”; in this case the mussel festival event (Neuman, 2003:185). In situ interviews and conversations include a variety of stakeholders, e.g. tourists, one-day visitors, local visitors, volunteers, organizers and local businesses (accommodation, restaurants, cafes, shops etc.). In total, around 50 interviews and more informal conversations were conducted in situ – supplemented by around 200 photos and various souvenirs, programs, flyers, folders etc. In the next sections, the key findings that emerged during analysis are presented.



## The Town and Branding

Løgstør is a market town in the Northern part of Jutland, Denmark. The town is located at the coast of Limfjorden (a saltwater bay area) and albeit fishery is less important for the local economy than it was in the past, common mussel is the most important catch for the local fishermen.

*Figure 5. Fragments of Løgstør*



Apart from fishery, the town also has a factory that processes mussels and at present, around 90 percent of the mussel production/harvest is exported. Apart from traditional mussel fishery, mussel farming has recently been introduced in the area. It is unclear whether mussel farming or traditional mussel fishery will dominate the area's mussel harvesting the future. Nonetheless, the local actors

have no doubt that mussels will continue to be important to the area – regardless of whether the majority of mussels will be farmed or fished. The town markets itself as ‘The town of mussels’ and heavily emphasizes mussels in its place branding efforts. For example, the first thing one sees when visiting the town’s official website (targeting tourists, potential settlers, business etc.) is the following logo (<http://www.muslingebyen.dk>):



Furthermore, most of the local restaurants emphasize mussels in their communication, or, as one of the restaurant websites proclaims ‘of course, mussel is a speciality of ours’. Accordingly, only the fast food restaurants (i.e. pizza parlors etc.) do not have mussels on the menu. Furthermore, the town’s largest attraction (i.e. Limfjordsmuseet, which is the museum of fishing and seafaring of the Limfjord) is heavily involved in the festival and furthermore offers ‘from bay to table’ outdoor cooking classes for children and collaborates with local chefs on a series of ‘mussel cooking classes’ (i.e. two hours sessions during which both a chef and a nature guide interact with the participants). Traditionally, place branding is often seen as the application of marketing and branding techniques by destination marketing organizations. However, in the Løgstør case, branding emphasizing mussels is not only evident in the communication of the DMO. Instead, the mussel theme is also used by the festival organizers, local restaurants, the Limfjord museum etc. Previous research (e.g. Blichfeldt, 2005; Hankinson, 2004; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005) has questioned the applicability of branding techniques to places and destinations; predominantly because DMOs cannot control the ‘product’ a place offers to its guests. Instead, all a DMO can do is to emphasize certain elements in its communication and hope that the products offered by various stakeholders (e.g. restaurants, accommodation, attractions etc.) and their communication hereof align with the brand elements, which the DMO emphasizes. However, a rather unique feature of the branding of Løgstør as ‘the

town of mussels’ is that the mussel theme is adopted by a wide range of local stakeholders as well as by those responsible for the festival, thus suggesting that all stakeholders’ products and communication draw on the same values and the same core story. Accordingly, although Løgstør may have multiple identities (Dematteis, 1994; Hankinson, 2004), the identity as ‘Muslingebyen’ (i.e. the town of mussels) is a core identity that all stakeholders emphasize in their communication.

## **The Festival**

As for the mussel festival, this is a four day event (Thursday to Sunday in the second week of July) with a program that includes a series of concerts, open galleries and artists’ workshops, various forms of maritime experiences (including sailing trips that incorporate storytelling about the bay and the town, rental of small traditional boats, ‘open ship’ events etc.), sea food buffet and the aforementioned main (or peak) event; i.e. Friday night free of charge mussels for all. The 2010 Mussel Festival gained substantial media coverage and furthermore, the organizers were very pleased with the estimated 5,000 guests that attended the festival during the four days it lasted (<http://www.nordjyskestiftstidende.dk/vesthimmerland/forside.aspx>).



**Figure 6. The Peak Event**



The first picture shows the sacks of mussels that are to be served during the peak event; in the background volunteers prepare for the cooking of the mussels. The upper, to the right picture shows some of the people lining up for free mussels. The two last pictures show people, who have had their bowls of mussels (the white bowls held by the two boys and the pregnant woman).

**Figure 7. After the Peak Event**



In order to try to illustrate the substantial volume of mussels that are consumed during the peak event, this picture shows one of the many trash containers that are filled with mussel shells after the peak event.

Apart from the gastronomic dimension, the festival also relies heavily on arts and local artists were heavily involved in the mussel festivals from the very start. For example, in 2005 (the first year of the festival), a series of local artists were asked to decorate a number of mussel sculptures and these sculptures still dominate the sea front area (and the guests come across the different sculptures as they walk around the city center).

***Figure 8. Mussel sculptures in the city center***



Apart from the mussel sculptures, the second picture also shows an example of how local artists exhibit their work during the festival.

Although the festival incorporates arts, music, gastronomy, maritime elements etc, mussels is the concept that ties the various elements of the festival together and thus, the festival aligns well with Janiske's (1980) argument that festivals are public celebration of a 'certain concept'. The interviews and informal conversations that were done during the festival revealed that festival visitors are rather heterogeneous in terms of length of stay, type of accommodation etc. Some visitors are one day or short break tourists that drive to Løgstør to experience the festival (some from close by areas; others driving for an hour or two to

come to the festival). Other guest are tourists that are already in the area (staying in holiday houses or at caravan sites), who come in to Løgstør for one or two days to experience the event. Another group of visitors are (predominantly Danish, Swedish and Norwegian) tourists, who sail around in the Limfjord during the holidays and port at different coastal towns for shorter periods of time. The sailors that the researcher talked to had all heard about the mussel festival in advance and had planned their multiple-stop-vacation so that they would port at Løgstør during the mussel festival.

**Figure 9. Sailing tourists**



The observations of the various groups of guests that the festival attracts are in line with the organizers' and the media's perceptions of who the guests at the festival are (<http://www.nordjyskestiftstidende.dk/vesthimmerland/forside.aspx>). Furthermore, all guests the researcher talked to during the festival knew about the festival *before* they came to Løgstør. As this case study predominantly draws on data that are qualitative in nature it is not possible to verify that the mussel festival qualifies as 'reason to go' for *all* guest. However, both in-depth and informal interviews suggest that the festival is 'reason to go' for *some* tourists. For example, a woman living in another area of Denmark (i.e. Sealand) explained why she was at the festival as follows:

*“My husband has tried this before and I’m very interested in food and very fond of shell fish, so here we are”.*

To visitors such as the woman quoted above, the mussel festival qualifies as a reason to go, thus making people who would otherwise not visit Løgtør come to the town. This is a feature that sets the mussel festival aside from ‘the ordinary town fair’ as such fairs rarely pull tourists in. As such, although tourists, who are already in the area may ‘swing by’ a town fair, a town fair is unlikely to pull tourists to the area in the same way as the mussel festivals do.

In comparison to Park et al’s (2008) findings pertaining to visitor motivation, at the mussel festival visitors especially seemed to be motivated by the fact that the festival focuses on *mussels*. As such, to learn about mussels and to have freshly made mussels (both at the Friday night peak event and at the restaurants) were peak experiences to nearly all visitors the researcher talked to (albeit not a reason to go for all of them). As mentioned previously (p. 15), the study also includes a series of in-depth interviews with people that did not attend the festival. These interviews revealed that many people do not eat mussels and if they do so, only a minority of them (i.e. 3 out of 20 interviewees) prepare and cook mussels at home. In fact, a series of interviewees had a hard time distinguishing between snails, oysters, squids and mussels and defined all of these entities as one blurry set of ‘disgusting food stuff’. However, the in situ interviews and conversations suggest that the vast majority of guests at the festival both cook and eat mussels. For example, most participants in the mussel cooking class were highly experienced ‘mussel cooks’ and predominantly partook in the cooking class in order to meet experts (i.e. the chef) and to get inspiration so that they could refine their own preparation of mussels at home. As another example, observations at the restaurants in the area suggest that mussels and mussel soup were the dishes ordered by the majority of guests. Furthermore, many visitors define themselves as people with a special interest in food and particularly in foods such as mussels, or as one visitor put it:

*“We love mussels but I think that is because we have travelled so much and especially our travelling in France has made us appreciate gastronomy and sea food such as mussels. That is also why we eat mussels at home – because we’ve been inspired to do so when we’ve been in France”.*

As indicated by the quote above, it seems that a substantial number of the visitors at the festival are people that take a special interest in food and especially in ‘food as gastronomy’ and people who define themselves as less neophobic (i.e. less afraid of novel and unfamiliar food) and more neophylic (i.e. better liking novel food stuff) than ‘most people’. Although highly tentative in nature, the empirical study indicates that the guests at the mussel festival may resemble Park et al’s (2008) guests at a wine and food festival insofar an element of ‘social status’ qualifies as a rather important motivational factor. The festival is, however, also visited by locals and some of these guests are more motivated by the fact that the festival is something that locals support than by the gastronomic dimension, or as one of the locals (who smilingly referred to herself as a ‘tourist from Løgstør’) said:

*“It’s my impression that everybody supports the mussel festival. When I look around I see many towns-people that I know. But this is also what Løgstør has become known for and it’s not like something that is invented; this is about what Løgstør is and always has been. And it is the biggest event in town and something that pulls people in from outside”.*

Although the local resident quoted above rarely eats mussels and does not work as a volunteer at the festival, she still sees the mussel festival as something that locals ought to support. As such, although the cooking and eating of mussels are not part of her identity as a Løgstør resident, she acknowledges mussels as a ‘celebration of the community’ (Getz, 1997) and as an integral part of both place identity (i.e. what Løgstør is) and place image (i.e. what Løgstør is *known for*). Accordingly, it seems that the mussel festivals do provide a ‘pride of



place’ (Hill, 1988) for local residents – not so much because the locals find the mussel theme personally relevant, but because they are proud of the awareness of, and visits to, Løgstør that the festivals create. Furthermore, the different residents that the researcher interacted with all defined the festivals as events that target external audiences and as something that is ‘good for the community’ and henceforth, events worthy of resident support.

## Branding or Celebration of Community Identity?

As discussed in the theory section, specialized food festivals in rural areas may be integral parts of place branding; may act as celebration of community identity and/or may be touristic events, the main purpose of which is to attract external audiences (i.e. tourists). As such, one would expect both the form and the content of food festivals to vary depending on the relative importance of each of the above listed purposes. Furthermore, as illustrated in the figure below, the main purpose of the festival might even have negative side effects in relation to other audiences.

Main purpose of the event/festival	Key target group(s)	Objectives that are <i>not</i> necessarily met and potential negative effects
Place branding	All external audiences that may have something to offer in the longer run (e.g. potential residents, potential investors, tourists)	Might not correspond with community identity or might even make locals feel alienated
Celebrating community identity	Local residents (individual residents, various organizations etc.)	Might not appeal to external audiences or may even have negative effects on these audiences
Destination branding	Tourists	Might not appeal to local residents and might not affect community identity positively. Might not appeal to other external audiences and might even negatively affect such alternate audiences

Although the table above is admittedly simplistic it does point to the fact that any festival with a clearly defined target group might ignore or negatively affect other groups. For example, a festival with a predominantly touristic aim might not appeal to local residents and may not lead to positive self-identification for the local community. In the same vein, a festival the main purpose of which is to lead to positive self-identification for the community may not appeal to tourists; or it might even be designed to only provide recreational and leisure activities for locals (Long & Perdue, 1990) (something that tourists who ‘accidentally’ attend local town fairs and feel alienated often define as a bad experience). Furthermore, a food festival that is highly intertwined with a broader place branding strategy may predominantly be a means to ends such as increasing awareness of the place in question; to symbolize that the place is ‘alive and kicking’; or to gain media coverage. Accordingly, to a festival that is integral part of a broader place branding strategy, success of the festival itself (measured by for example visitor numbers or sales/profit generated during the event) may even be secondary to the success of the festival in terms of generating awareness and strong, favorable and unique associations to the place brand. Although the different purposes of a food festival are not mutually exclusive, further knowledge on the relative importance of the purposes is needed if we wish to better understand food festivals.

What triggered the Løgstør mussel festivals was that a local painter invited a series of other residents to an informal discussion about the problems experienced in the town at that time (e.g. vacant stores and shops, housing price levels, less new residents than one could wish for) and whether ‘something could be done’ in order to make the area more attractive (Andersen & Damgaard, 2010). At this first, informal meeting local artists, the managing director of the town’s largest production company, a person who had just moved to the area and who had experience in events and representatives from the town fair, the local jazz festival, the local trade association, the local restaurants and the local tourist organization were present. These people soon decided that the theme for this first,



informal meeting should be whether it was possible to identify something that was unique for the town and they soon reached consensus as to mussels being both unique to the area and something that could brand the town. Compared to traditional conceptions of specialized festivals and events in rural areas as something that is started by a few ‘dedicated souls’ with a special interest in a particular theme (e.g. jazz music, knitting or folk dance), the Løgstør case stands out as the festivals were started by a series of people that (a) represented all key stakeholders in the town, (b) did not have any particular themed festival in mind, (c) deliberately sought after a theme that could brand the town and make it stand out from other towns and (d) had a clear idea that the purpose was not ‘just’ to make ‘yet another’ festival or event, but to do something that would strengthen the place brand. Accordingly, this group of people did *not* set out to make a festival. Instead, they set out to ‘do something’ that would positively affect the brand equity of the place Løgstør. Andersen and Damgaard (2010) argue that the main purpose of the mussel festivals is ‘to attract newcomers/new residents to a town with a dramatically decreasing of the population’. In the same vein, one of the organizers explains the reasons why the organizers spend lots of time and resources on the mussel festivals as follows:

*“It has to do with getting people to come here and experience what we have to offer – and perhaps what we have to offer is also more unique than we tend to think ourselves – and for them to think that this is a nice place. And when they have visited us a number of times, they might start thinking about that small house in Fjordgade [the name of one of the streets close to the sea front – translates roughly into ‘Bay Street’] that is for sale”.*

or, as this was phrased by another festival organizer:

*“The festival and such things are means to an end, but the end goal is settlement - and the support from the local population is the precondition”.*

As evident in all three explications of the aim of the mussel festivals, the purpose is to make people aware of Løgstør and – on the basis of their visits to Løgstør – to form strong, unique and favorable associations to the Løgstør brand. Given the fact that the festivals do pull guests to the destination, the festivals seem to fulfill this purpose. However, what is especially interesting is that the mussel festivals – from the very start – first and foremost were place branding initiatives and not celebrations of community identity. Furthermore, from the very start the organizers drew on branding knowledge and competencies and the branding vocabulary (to *brand* Løgstør, to identify and use something that is *unique*, to create *awareness* and to facilitate memorable *experiences*) is present in both the interviews and in the various speeches etc. that were given at the festival. Accordingly, the mussels festivals are far more than simply food festivals in rural areas as they are place branding efforts, the purpose of which is to strengthen equity of the Løgstør brand.

## Guests versus Tourists

The organizers of the festival are aware of the fact that what is decisive for positive place brand equity is *not* that people visit the destination, but instead, that they have positive and memorable experiences during the stay. As such, the festival organizers are aware that they (as DMOs) can (only) make people come to the destination, whereas the experiences people have at the destination heavily depend on both local businesses (e.g. accommodation, restaurants, shops) and on the ways, in which local residents interact with the guests. A central mantra of the festival organizers (and one that was repeated both in the interviews and in the official speeches during the festival) is:

*“In Løgstør, we don’t have tourists. We only have guests”.*

This mantra is interesting as it clearly states the roles and obligations of the host community. Furthermore, these roles and obligations are not enacted as some-

thing only those directly involved in the festivals and/or in the tourism/hospitality sector should take on. On the contrary, the expression ‘we’ means that all actors in Løgstør (including the residents) are to take on the role as a host in relation to the guests (and potential residents) that the festivals pull in. Accordingly, the festivals are also manifestations of a place branding strategy, according to which the notion of hospitality does not only encompass the commercial hospitality offered by those, who directly profit from tourists, but also the more informal encounters between the tourists and the local residents in non-commercial contexts.

## **Implications and Conclusion**

In the methodology section, Løgstør and the mussel festivals were classified as ‘a typical case’ (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Seawright & Gerrin, 2008) that represents other food festivals in rural areas. However, the analysis of the case suggests that the Løgstør case might not be typical at all. The key reason why the Løgstør case might, in fact, be rather atypical is that the mussel festivals are not simply specialized food festivals in rural areas. Instead, they are place branding initiatives and were intended to be so from the very start. In the figure on page 26, three different objectives for food festivals in rural areas were listed. Drawing on this figure, the Løgstør case is both clearly and explicitly positioned within the group of festivals, the purpose of which is to ‘do’ place branding whereas it is *not* – nor was it ever intended to be – a means for community self-celebration. On the contrary, as one of the organizers pointed out, Løgstør has a town fair that serves that purpose.

The success (or not) of a festival, the aim of which is to celebrate community identity is likely to be measured by the extent to which local residents define this festival as a celebration and/or the extent to which it enhances community identity. In the same vein, a festival with a destination branding background is mostly measured by the number of tourists it pulls, the money spent by these

tourists, the actual experience or satisfaction that these tourists have (as exemplified by the three word-of-keyboard reviews in the introduction) etc. Due to the fact that the mussel festivals are place branding initiatives, the criteria of success for such festivals are more complex though. Hence, whereas an important element of success for both festivals that celebrate community identity and those that target tourists is that the festival attendants (residents and tourists respectively) have ‘a great festival’ this might not be the case for festivals that qualify as place branding efforts. As such, the criterion of success for the mussel festivals in Løgstør is *not* to ‘have a great festival’ (however one defines that). On the contrary, the mussel festivals are successful insofar they enhance brand equity for the town of Løgstør, i.e. if they create *awareness* of, and visits to, Løgstør and if the end result of these visits is that guests form favourable, strong and unique *associations* to the Løgstør brand; associations that may spur positive *word-of-mouth* communication and increase guest *re-visits* as well as *settlement* in the longer run.

In the methodology section, case study research was rendered especially useful when the boundaries between the phenomenon (e.g. a specialized food festival in a rural area) and the context (e.g. a town such as Løgstør) are not clearly evident. The analysis upon which this paper draws suggests that – at least in the Løgstør case – it makes little sense to study the festival without taking the broader notion of the place into account. As the analysis shows, the mussel festivals are meant to enhance equity of the place brand and consequently, the festivals would probably not exist if it was not for this purpose. However, it does not take much effort to identify a welter of festivals (including food festivals) that are successful, without though, in any way being intertwined with place branding. Obviously, the mussel festivals would have little explanatory power in regard to such festivals. Accordingly, the key lesson we can learn from this single case study is that any investigation of food festivals that are part of a broader place (and particularly destination) branding strategy should also include investigation of the ‘town branding context’. Furthermore, the single case

study raises the question whether cases such as the Løgstør case have ‘enough’ in common with festivals that are *not* intertwined with place branding strategies for us to define the object of investigation as ‘food festivals’. Thus, the mussel festivals *may* be typical cases of food festivals in rural areas as integral parts of broader place branding strategies, but *not* as typical examples of food festivals in general.

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